

Bringing Indigenous Wisdom into Life and Education



ReCONNECTING Conference: October, 2018

by Nancy Jewel Poer

Beautiful circles, amazing timeless moments, deepest gratitude for life and our natural world was shared in many hearts as sixty five participants gathered at beautiful White Feather Ranch in the Sierra foothills for this conference. There were representatives from twelve Waldorf schools and teachers from as far away as Arizona, Oregon, and Georgia.

Our gifted native presenters, who are all well known artists, teachers, and Waldorf parents, shared the views and thinking of wise indigenous people today who carry the legacy of living in harmony with earth and life. James Marquez, Stan Padilla, Aiona Anderson, and Aaron Sumexheltza represented three native bio regions, the Great Plains (Lakota), Mexico (Yaqui), and Canada (Lower Nicola).

The focus was also to bring correction to truths of America's history as taught in our schools. Their statements were firm. "Columbus did not 'discover' America. He came with papal bulls, the 'doctrines of discovery' originally designed for wars of conquest in Europe and then extended to new territories. *Dum Diversas 1452*—an edict to claim title, in the name of the church at God's command, to all lands not inhabited by Christians, described as 'pagans and other enemies of Christ,' and consign them to 'perpetual slavery,' including by military force, convert them for 'use and profit.'" The devastat-

ing legacies of that doctrine are all too apparent. Surely the prominent enshrining of the statue of Queen Isabella sending Columbus forth in the California state capital is no longer appropriate in 2018.

Aiona's story is representative of all the presenters' ancestral experience. She told of her people living peacefully and sustainably in Canada, in a region accessible only by horseback, and how they were "discovered" by a white man who promptly named them after himself. When Aiona was young, the authorities came and gave her parents two choices: have their children removed and placed in different foster homes, or sent to residential school where it turned out they were also separated. They chose the church run boarding school hoping for educational opportunities. Instead, Aiona and the others experienced decidedly "un-Christian" punishing abuse, degradation, and the destruction of language and identity. The motto was "Kill the Indian to save the man."

Aiona's strong-spirited mother, who did not read or write, told the many graduate students who later sought her out, that she knew so much because she didn't have their kind of education and told them that if a disaster occurred they would not survive but she certainly would as she





knew how to live with the land!

In recent native generations, hopes have lain in gaining power through education to effectively find justice in the face of these ongoing violations of human rights. Aiona's son, Aaron, a Waldorf-educated tribal chief and attorney, has been able to do just that.

At one point during the healing medicine wheel ceremony, Aiona movingly sang for us and immediately a sudden wind came up in the center of the Peace circle that is surrounded by over arching oak trees. In impressive response, the leaves came raining down upon us like a blessing and affirmation from the ancestors and the natural world. The sunrise ceremony, and that of acknowledging those who had walked this land long before us, at the native grinding rocks nearby, were both healing and inspiring.

If our teachers cannot feel a reverent connection to the natural world as such native people can, they cannot share with the children they teach a deep love of the world and appreciation of all the gifts that plant, animal, and human relationships bring us. Thus, we all become ever further disconnected from reality, trading real life for a technological cy-

ber world, and increasingly entrapped by and dependent upon our electronic machines and gadgets. This gratitude and knowing is a primal soul condition for the educator if we are to keep our humanity and foster it in our children. "Heart thinking" was so beautifully expressed by all our presenters; an understanding of the laws of reciprocity with the natural world such as never taking more than you need and honoring and using all you take. Stan and James led us in these vital celebrations of life with moving rituals of deepening respect for everyone present, and shared their lives and views permeated with grateful and respectful inclusion of all life. James guided the group in native methods of beautiful jewelry creation with soapstone and pine nuts. Popular native story teller, Rick Adams, entertained all at the evening campfire, with animal "teaching stories," lively tales from our local Miwok/Maidu tribes.

Our materialistic, exploitive culture that promotes the greed of endless acquisition is not only destroying the earth but preventing us from the kind of thinking that will allow progress toward the economic brotherhood we desperately need. Rudolf Steiner outlines this in the laws of the threefold social order. We must first change our thinking to that of the "New Mind," as the Great Iroquois Peacemaker brought nearly 1000 years ago when their spiritually-inspired democracy began.

We closed with the Iroquois Thanksgiving address giving thanks for all life given to us by the Creator of the Universe.

All school curriculum needs enriching and "truing" for our time. This was a powerful beginning and we hope for further deepening work together in a "ReCONNECTING" gathering in the coming year.

Nancy Jewel Poer, October, 2018, White Feather Ranch, Placerville, California; Co-Sponsor with Jack Petrash, Nova Institute

